

“I never could forget my darling mother”: The language of recollection in a corpus of female Irish emigrant correspondence

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“I never could forget my darling mother”

The language of recollection in a corpus of female Irish emigrant correspondence

1. Introduction

The post-famine period from the 1850s to the 1920s was a time that saw a significant increase in female migration from Ireland to North America. Economic changes in Ireland, including declining wage-earning capabilities due to the de-industrialisation of the Irish countryside, as well as changes in inheritance practices from partible to impartible inheritance systems, led to changes in marriage trends. In short, women married ‘less frequently and at later ages than in the pre-famine past’, thus contributing to ‘a massive post-famine emigration by young, unmarried women’ (Miller et. al., 1995, p. 3). Between 1852 and 1921 the median age for female Irish emigrants was 21.2 and after 1880 young women constituted the majority of the departing Irish (Miller, 1985, p. 392). A small glimpse into the lives of these young women – their preoccupations, experiences, perceptions and beliefs – can be found in the letters they wrote home to their families in Ireland.

This essay uses a mixed methods approach to a calendar of female Irish emigrant correspondence – the Lough family letters¹ – extracted from a larger collection of Irish emigrant correspondence collated by Professor Kerby Miller in the 1970s.² It combines traditional historical sciences methods with digital humanities, using corpus³ and computational tools (including *Sketch Engine*⁴ and *Wmatrix*⁵) to

¹ Among the Irish relatives the spelling later became ‘Locke’ – very close to the Irish pronunciation of the name – and was written Lowe on some official documents.

² Professor Kerby Miller, Curators’ Professor, Department of History, University of Missouri: <http://history.missouri.edu/people/miller.html>.

³ A corpus can be defined as a ‘bod[y] of naturally occurring language data stored on computers’ and corpus techniques of analysis as the ‘computational procedures which manipulate this data in various ways . . . to uncover linguistic patterns which can enable us to make sense of the ways that language is used’ (Baker, 2006, p. 1).

mine the texts for particular attributes, discussed further in section 4. In so doing, it offers new insights into the study of the female emigrant letter, whilst at the same time proposing a method of content analysis that could be applied across letter collections. This essay locates itself at the nexus of migration history, gender and emotions.

2. The Lough Letters

The Lough family letters are from Professor Miller's personal archive of Irish emigrant correspondence, housed at the University of Missouri. Significantly, these letters are drawn from a much larger body of Irish emigrant correspondence collected by Miller. Miller himself has explored this wider corpus in several pioneering works on Irish emigration (see, for instance, *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America* (1985) and *Irish Immigrants in the Land of Canaan: Letters and Memoirs from Colonial and Revolutionary America, 1675-1815* (2003)) and his archive of over 5,000 letters has been referred to by many scholars including Emmons (1990), Koos (2001), Bruce (2006), Corrigan (1992) and Noonan (2011). But the Lough family correspondence, which is a small but significant part of Miller's collection, has attracted less attention.⁶

⁴ Kilgariff, A., & Kosem, I. (2012). Corpus Tools for Lexicographers. In S. Granger, & M. Paquot (Eds.), *Electronic Lexicography* (31-56). New York: Oxford University Press. Available from: <http://www.sketchengine.co.uk>. See also Kilgariff (2004).

⁵ Rayson, P. (2009). *Wmatrix*. Lancaster University. Available from: <http://ucrel.lancs.ac.uk/wmatrix/>. See also Rayson (2008).

⁶ In the early 1950s, a few of the Lough letters were initially donated by Canice and Eilish O'Mahony of Dundalk, County Louth, to Arnold Schrier, then a graduate student at Northwestern University, now Professor Emeritus at the University of Cincinnati, who subsequently employed them, alongside other epistolary documents, in his 1958 book *Ireland and the Irish Emigration, 1850-1900*. In 1977-78 the rest of the Lough letters were donated to Miller by the O'Mahonys and by Edward Dunne and Kate Tynan of Portlaoise, County Laois. Both Miller and Schrier, who thereafter collaborated in researching Irish migration to America, made photocopies and transcriptions of these letters, and Miller returned the original manuscripts to their donors.

In most cases, the Lough collection contains a photocopy of each original manuscript (Fig. 1) together with a typed transcription (Fig. 2). In 2011, Emma Moreton, Coventry University produced digital transcriptions of the letters (Fig. 3). The digital transcriptions retain the original spellings, grammar, punctuation and line breaks.

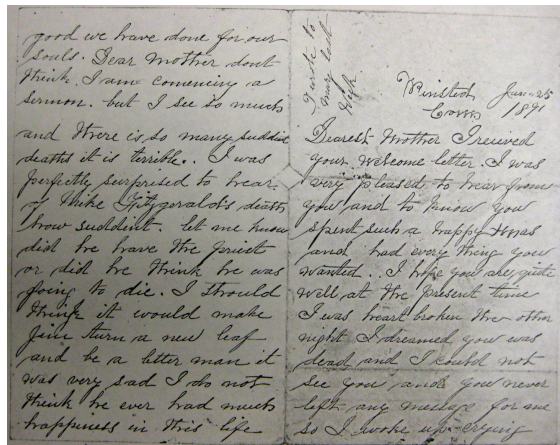


Figure 1: Photocopy of original manuscript (Julia Lough Collection, 25 January 1891)

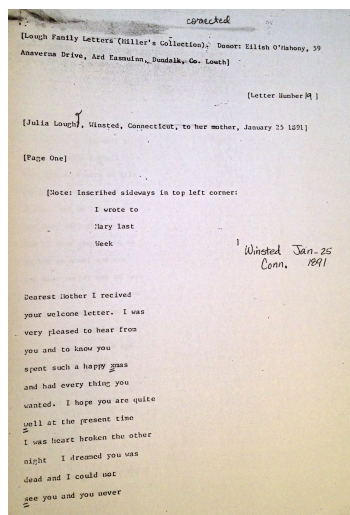


Figure 2: Miller's typed transcription (Julia Lough Collection, 25 January 1891)

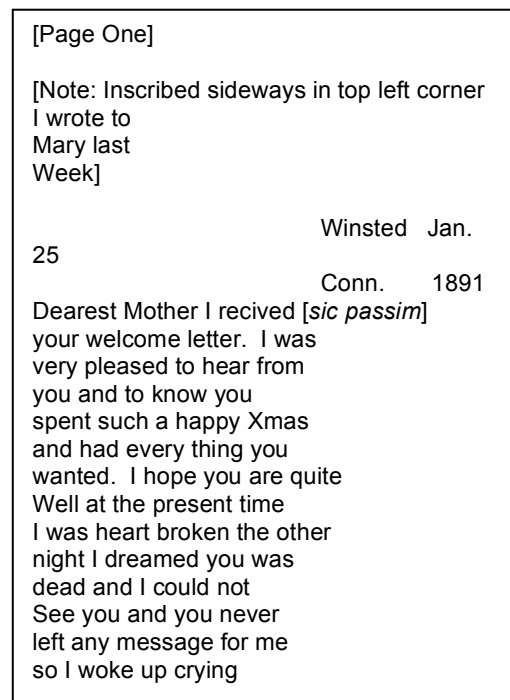


Figure 3: Moreton's digital transcription (*Julia Lough Collection*, 25 January 1891)

What follows is some brief background information, gathered by Miller, relating to the Lough sisters.⁷ The five Lough sisters – Elizabeth, Alice, Annie, Julia and Mary – came from a Roman Catholic family in Meelick, in what was then called Queen's County (now County Laois), Ireland. The five sisters were daughters of Elizabeth McDonald Lough and James Lough who lived on a small holding consisting of two fields; one of the fields, according to family legend, was sold to pay for the sisters' passages. The Lough family was not of the lowest class as both parents and daughters were able to write. Apart from Mary – the youngest sibling – all the Lough sisters emigrated to America between 1870 and 1884. The sisters who emigrated were, in Miller's words, four 'very dutiful, hard-working, and pious Irish female immigrants'; the sisters remained close both geographically and emotionally throughout their lives.⁸

⁷ I am indebted to personal communications with Kerby Miller for the information that follows. See too Miller (2008).

⁸ This quotation is taken from correspondence between Miller and Mrs Edward McKenna (one of the donors).

In his 2008 study, *Ireland and Irish America: Culture, Class, and Transatlantic Migration*, Miller argues that ‘Irish emigration was based on *family* – not individual – decisions: choices by Irish parents as to which of their children to send or allow to go abroad first; and choices by Irish Americans as to which of their siblings, cousins, or other relatives to encourage and assist to emigrate and join them’ (p. 307). Indeed, this familial dynamic is clearly evident in the migration story of the Lough sisters. Elizabeth Lough (sometimes referred to as Liz or Lizzie) was the first sister to emigrate in 1870. She initially lived with her aunt and uncle from her mother’s side – George and Anne Burke – who preceded Elizabeth to America and may have contributed to her passage. In turn, it is likely that Elizabeth contributed to the migration costs of her younger sisters. Elizabeth lived in Winsted, Litchfield County, Connecticut, where she worked mainly as a seamstress. She married Dan Walsh, who worked on a passenger train, and had five children (Tom, Alice, John William, Catherine Elizabeth and James). Dan Walsh appears to have died on 20 November 1896; Elizabeth died several years later on 28 July 1923.

Alice Lough (sometimes referred to as Alisha or Alicia) emigrated in the 1870s. Alice appears to have married before she emigrated – Miller has a copy of her marriage certificate dated 27 May 1875. In America, her husband, Edward Elliott, was an employee in a shop or factory that made coffins. Alice and her husband lived in Winsted between 1870 and 1880 before moving to Hampden County, Massachusetts in 1881 with several of their eventual seven children (Mary Elizabeth (born 14 August 1876), Edward, James (a railroad conductor, who died on 8 April 1918), William (who served in World War I), John, Alice and Phillip). Alice died on 23 September 1922.

Annie (sometimes referred to as Nan) Lough was the third sister to emigrate, in 1878; she lived in Winsted all her life where she appears to have worked as a servant for a while. Annie married John McMahon on 9 June 1886 – a labourer or factory worker – however, she bore no children. Annie died in Winsted in 1935; her husband died on 18 September 1936.

And finally, Julia Lough emigrated in September 1884 at the age of thirteen. After arriving in America, Julia lived in Winsted with her sister Elizabeth and her brother-in-law Dan Walsh between 1884 and 1894. In approximately 1895 she moved to Litchfield County, Connecticut, where she remained until at least 1927, the point when her letters stop. Julia was somewhat of a success story, working as a seamstress to begin with, then from the age of nineteen as an apprentice dressmaker, before becoming a professional dressmaker and opening up her own shop on Main Street, where she employed several members of staff. On 21 June 1897, at the age of twenty-five, Julia married a well-respected, Irish-born railroad engineer, Thomas McCarthy, with whom she had six children (although only one, Elise, is named in her letters). Julia died in Torrington, Litchfield County on 22 February 1959; her husband died shortly after on 8 April 1959.

Mary Lough remained in Ireland with her mother and father, helping to run the family home. She married John Fitzpatrick and had four daughters. Her siblings, it seems, viewed Mary as ‘the lucky one’, being allowed to remain in Ireland with her parents. In a letter dated March 1893, Julia writes: ‘See what a different life yours and mine has been I am sure you are happy in having such a good husband and Now your own children and having Mother there always but then I think you were always the best to Mother and it is only fair you Should receive the reward [*sic passim*]’ (*Julia*

Lough Collection, 21 March 1893).⁹ Besides Mary, there may have been one other Lough sister who stayed in Ireland, whose married name was Hickey. However, this is unconfirmed.

There are ninety-nine letters in the Lough collection. This essay will focus on 35 of those letters, namely, the correspondence of Julia Lough (see Table 1 for an overview of the *Julia Lough Collection*). Table 1 shows that 23 of the 35 letters are addressed to Julia's mother, while 12 are addressed to Julia's sister, Mary. Most of Julia's letters (33 out of 35) date from 1884 to 1895. Two later letters were sent from Julia to Mary between 1919 and 1927. Some of the letters are not dated, but their content has allowed them to be placed within an approximate timeframe. There is a 24-year gap in Julia's writing between LOUGH_031 (number 33 in the first column) sent in 1895 and LOUGH_102 (number 34 in the first column) sent in 1919-1920. In addition to managing her business these were Julia's childbearing years, and it is quite possible that Julia may have been unable to muster a remittance during this critical period, which might explain the lack of communication. However, this is not to say that Julia did not write any letters home during this period; rather, there are no letters in Miller's collection from this time. Most of the letters dated between 1884, when Julia first emigrated, and 1894 were sent from Winsted in Connecticut. In around 1895 Julia relocates to Torrington, Connecticut. By this time, Julia's mother had died, and the six letters sent from Torrington are addressed to Mary. The average word length for Julia's letters is 349.

⁹ This family structure (whereby the older siblings emigrated while the youngest sibling remained at home to look after the family) may reflect ultimogeniture practices in rural Ireland. See Ó Gráda (1980).

	Reference	From: town	From: country	Recipient	To: town	To: country	No. of Words	Day	Month	Year
1	LOUGH_005	Queenstown	Ireland	Mother	Meelick	Ireland	40	27	September	1884
2	LOUGH_062	-	Ireland / England	Mother	Meelick	Ireland	98			1884
3	LOUGH_006	Winsted	America	Sister	Meelick	Ireland	519	20	December	1884
4	LOUGH_079	Winsted	America	Mother	Meelick	Ireland	190			1884-1894
5	LOUGH_008	Winsted	America	Mother	Meelick	Ireland	342		December	1888
6	LOUGH_009	Winsted	America	Mother	Meelick	Ireland	444	3	November	1889
7	LOUGH_010	Winsted	America	Mother	Meelick	Ireland	436	2	December	1889
8	LOUGH_089	Winsted	America	Mother	Meelick	Ireland	487			1889-1890
9	LOUGH_072	Winsted	America	Mother	Meelick	Ireland	259			1889-1894
10	LOUGH_013	Winsted	America	Mother	Meelick	Ireland	463	9	March	1890
11	LOUGH_015	Winsted	America	Mother	Meelick	Ireland	366	10	August	1890
12	LOUGH_017	Winsted	America	Mother	Meelick	Ireland	350		December	1890
13	LOUGH_018	Winsted	America	Sister	Meelick	Ireland	348	18	January	1891
14	LOUGH_019	Winsted	America	Mother	Meelick	Ireland	351	25	January	1891
15	LOUGH_034	Winsted	America	Mother	Meelick	Ireland	225	30	March	1891
16	LOUGH_020	Winsted	America	Mother	Meelick	Ireland	317	18	October	1891
17	LOUGH_021	Winsted	America	Mother	Meelick	Ireland	300	14	December	1891
18	LOUGH_068	Winsted	America	Mother	Meelick	Ireland	400	11	May	pre-1892
19	LOUGH_023	Winsted	America	Mother	Meelick	Ireland	396	1	September	1892
20	LOUGH_064	Winsted	America	Mother	Meelick	Ireland	321			1892-1893
21	LOUGH_105	Winsted	America	Sister	Meelick	Ireland	423	21	March	1893
22	LOUGH_070	Winsted	America	Mother	Meelick	Ireland	305		May	1893
23	LOUGH_025	Winsted	America	Mother	Meelick	Ireland	340		July	1893
24	LOUGH_075	Winsted	America	Mother	Meelick	Ireland	356	3	September	1893
25	LOUGH_029	Winsted	America	Mother	Meelick	Ireland	334	10	October	1893
26	LOUGH_026	Winsted	America	Mother	Meelick	Ireland	451		December	1893
27	LOUGH_076	Torrington	America	Sister	Meelick	Ireland	183	25	March	1894
28	LOUGH_085	Torrington	America	Sister	Meelick	Ireland	477	24	May	1893-1894
29	LOUGH_074	Torrington	America	Sister	Meelick	Ireland	354			1889-1894
30	LOUGH_027	Winsted	America	Sister	Meelick	Ireland	736	4	June	1894
31	LOUGH_028	Winsted	America	Sister	Meelick	Ireland	469		November	1895
32	LOUGH_086	Queenstown	Ireland	Sister	Meelick	Ireland	44	8	July	1895
33	LOUGH_031	Torrington	America	Sister	Meelick	Ireland	416		August	1895
34	LOUGH_102	Torrington	America	Sister	Meelick	Ireland	331	17	March	1919-1920
35	LOUGH_057	Torrington	America	Sister	Meelick	Ireland	349	9	November	1927

Table 1: The *Julia Lough Collection*

3. Historiography

The personal letter has been one of the main mechanisms for accessing and understanding ‘history from below’.¹⁰ While many important studies in British and European history have focused on rescuing the voices of the poor and retrieving ‘working-class “ego-documents” and autobiographical writings’ (Richards, 2006, p. 58) – see for instance the collection of *Essex Pauper Letters, 1731-1837* written by, or on behalf of, paupers seeking support from the local poor law in the county of Essex¹¹ – there has been little ‘sign of any convergence with recent comparable work on emigrant letters’ despite the fact that migrant correspondence frequently does reach

¹⁰ A term coined by the Spanish writer Miguel de Unamuno in 1985. ‘It refers to the value of the humble and anonymous lives experienced by ordinary men and women in everyday contexts which form the essence of normal social interactions, as opposed to the lives of leaders and famous people that are generally accounted for in canonical histories’ (Amador-Moreno et. al., 2016 *forth.*).

¹¹ Other studies which focus on the writings of the poor include Burnett et. al. (1984), Fairman (2000) and Yokoyama (2008).

into comparable layers of society (ibid., p. 59).¹² At the same time, however, the emigrant letter is different from the pauper letter in that ‘it was rarely the plea of “the powerless to the powerful”’. Emigrants were likely to have been much more literate than paupers (though some were both paupers and emigrants)’ (ibid., p. 61).¹³ Additionally, while pauper letters may reveal something about social hierarchies of the time, the emigrant letter offers insights into family power paradigms and intergenerational sensibilities (knowing one’s place within the notional familial hierarchy and knowing how to write a certain way to different family members).

For some scholars, the emigrant letter provides ‘the unmediated voice...the voice of pure experience’ (Elliott et. al., 2006, p. 7). O’Farrell, for example, examining Ulster emigrants to Australia, maintains that correspondence provides ‘an intimate insight into what the migrant actually thought and felt, expressed without constraint, and with the honesty and candour appropriate to close family situations’ (O’Farrell, 1984, p. 3, cited in Fitzpatrick, 2004, p. 25). However, as Elliott et. al. point out, this is not entirely true as writers were almost certainly influenced by the language of church or politics and ‘most probably they learned to write letters by reading the letters of others’ (2006, p. 7).¹⁴ Nevertheless, whilst recognising influencing factors such as the context of situation (the circumstances in which the letter was produced) or broader still the context of culture (the societal pressure for the author to perform in a particular way – by writing the letter in the first place and by respecting a particular culture of letter writing when doing so), nineteenth century migrant correspondence, or more specifically the language contained therein, provides the best evidence available for understanding experiences of migration. Examining

¹² Although emigrants came from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds the vast majority were, as Erickson puts it, ‘ordinary working people’ (1972, p. 1).

¹³ Richards (2006, p. 61) quoting James Scott in Hitchcock, King, and Sharp (1996, p. 6).

¹⁴ In other words, ‘immigrant writers were immersed in cultures which informed their often tentative writing’ (Elliott et. al., 2006, p. 7).

the language of personal correspondence reveals something about how the letter writer construed events and perceived the world, as well as providing insight into how family relationships were reinforced and reconfigured over distance and time.¹⁵

Previous research that examines topics and themes within the discourse of Irish migrant correspondence typically involves a close reading of the letters in question. Two of the most notable studies are Miller's 1985 book *Emigrants and Exiles* and Fitzpatrick's 1994 book *Oceans of Consolation*. Miller examines Irish migration to North America from 1607 to 1921. He argues that although most Irish who crossed the Atlantic were 'voluntary emigrants who went abroad in search of better economic and social opportunities – that is, for the same reasons motivating emigrants from other parts of Europe' (1985, p. 6) they often viewed themselves as involuntary exiles, 'compelled to leave home by forces beyond individual control, particularly by British and landlord oppression' (1985, p. 556). To explore this incongruity, Miller analyses 5,000 emigrant letters and memoirs (as well as poems, songs and folklore), looking at how references to homesickness and separation, as well as references to the homeland and the New World, contributed to the theme of emigration as exile. Miller's argument is that 'Irish-American homesickness, alienation, and nationalism were rooted ultimately in a traditional Irish Catholic worldview which predisposed Irish emigrants to perceive or at least justify themselves not as voluntary, ambitious emigrants but as involuntary, nonresponsible "exiles"' (1985, p. 556).¹⁶ Fitzpatrick,

¹⁵ As argued by Scott, it is not possible to separate language and experience since language constructs identities, 'position[s] subjects and produce[s]...experiences' (1992, p. 25). Scott's view is shared by linguists Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) and Hoey (2005). Whilst what underpins Halliday and Matthiessen's work on systemic functional grammar is the notion of choice (the lexicogrammatical possibilities that 'allow [a] speaker to represent the world in a particular way' (Hunston, 2006, p. 65)), what underpins Hoey's theory of lexical priming is the idea that individuals are primed to use language in a certain way, therefore raising questions regarding the very notion of choice. Both theories, however, come from the standpoint that language and experience are inherently connected.

¹⁶ This worldview, Miller suggests, dates back to pre-modern times when 'Gaelic culture's secular, religious, and linguistic aspects expressed or reinforced a worldview which deemphasized and even condemned individualistic and innovative actions such as emigration' (1985, p. 556).

using a much smaller dataset and focusing on a much shorter timespan, explores nineteenth century Irish migration to Australia. Unlike Miller, Fitzpatrick publishes his letters in full (111 letters of which 55 were sent to Australia and 56 to Ireland, between 1843 and 1906) and then analyses those letters for topics and themes so as to lay bear ‘at least one reading of the...letter[s]’ (1994, p. 26). Fitzpatrick observes themes such as ‘home’, ‘loneliness’, and ‘nostalgia’ – features of emigrant correspondence that are also noted by Miller; however, he ‘reports no comparable use of the [‘exile’ trope] among the Irish migrants in Australia’ (Elliott et. al., 2006, p. 11).¹⁷

More recent research in the, now burgeoning, field of the history of emotions demonstrates how the meaning and use of terms such as ‘homesickness’ and ‘nostalgia’ have changed since their introduction into the English language in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.¹⁸ Matt points out that ‘while generations of scholars long assumed that emotions were “tangential” to the fruitful study of the past, historians of the emotions argue that they are central to historical narratives, for their shifting meanings reveal much about the social attitudes and outlooks that were prevalent in earlier eras’ (2011, p. 9). Central to the growing interdisciplinary interest in emotions is the idea that ‘human feelings are influenced by cultural and social life’ which ‘serves as the basis of modern historical explorations’ (Matt, 2014, p.41 citing Lucien Febvre). For many historians, the study of language is key to understanding emotions history since ‘feelings cannot exist completely independently of

¹⁷ See, also, O’Farrell (1984; 1987; 1990) for accounts on Irish migrants in Australia and New Zealand, based largely on letters and family memoir. See also McCarthy’s 2005 study, *Irish Migrants in New Zealand*, which – ‘in order to facilitate comparative endeavours...’ follows the classification used by the Thematic Index of David Fitzpatrick’s *Oceans of Consolation*. For a detailed account of patterns of Irish migration to other countries including Australia, New Zealand and South Africa see Akenson (1997).

¹⁸ Matt points out that ‘before the seventeenth century, the word nostalgia did not exist, and before the eighteenth century the English word homesickness did not either’. Matt goes on to say that ‘the invention of these terms reflected a new concern about the emotions that were becoming apparent in early modern society’ (2011, p. 9-10).

language...[b]y choosing to identify and name one's feelings in one way rather than another, individuals define their emotions in the process of expressing them' (ibid., p. 43). Whilst I would certainly agree with the notion that language both reflects and constructs reality (see footnote 15), identifying emotions in ego-documents such as personal letters can be challenging, even more so when dealing with hundreds, sometimes thousands, of texts, as the labels that have been assigned to particular emotions – 'homesickness', 'nostalgia', or 'regret', for instance – are rarely used by the authors themselves. Julia, for example, often refers to weather and the changing seasons when expressing feelings of homesickness: 'The leaves are falling very fast today looks like winter makes me lonesome' (*Julia Lough Collection*, n.d. 1889-1894); a search for the word 'home/homesick/homesickness' in her correspondence, however, would yield no results. This raises the question of how emotions are verbally expressed by individual letter writers; and, from a methodological perspective, in searching emigrant letter collections for emotional content, what in the language should we be searching for?

Another issue in examining topics, themes and emotions in personal correspondence is the question of whether to go big (examine lots of letter collections) or go small (focus on one letter series). As Richards (2010) points out, 'emigrant letters speak for the individual letter-writer but, in sufficient numbers, they also create a collective account of the world into which they were relocated, uprooted or otherwise' (pp. 3-4). Some studies use emigrant letters as a way into understanding the collective – 'historians commonly extrapolate informally and unconsciously from individual testimony towards a view of "the spirit of the age", or the common "mentalities", or "ways of thinking" of the times'; other studies are more interested in 'the dense specificity of personal experience' which 'is always unique, because each

of us has a slightly or very different personal history, modifying every new experience we have' (Richards, 2010, pp. 3-4 citing Lodge, 2002, pp. 10-11).

While studies that prioritise the collective might be accused of assigning the migrant to an anonymous mass, thereby silencing the various individual voices of the letter writers, studies that prioritise the individual might be accused of not doing anything more than offering a biography and life story; as Richards puts it, 'returning [migrant correspondence] to the micro-historical form' simultaneously 'denies that emigrants' letters can be made the basis of any kind of historical sociology' (2010, p. 13).¹⁹ Richards goes on to say that this approach (which focuses on the psyche of the individual writer) 'is an austere and severely constraining formulation which restricts the source too much, and empties out the baby with the bath water' (ibid.).

However, arguably, the overarching question is not so much about whether to focus on the individual or the collective (since both approaches offer valuable new insights), it is more to do with how to reconcile the individual with the general; the fragments with the whole (Lyons, 2010, p. 14). In other words, how can the voices of individual migrants be understood within their broader historical context, thereby giving 'a human dimension to significant historical issues'? (Lyons, 2010, p. 18). Indeed, as argued by Guldi and Armitage, '...questions about how to preserve subaltern voices through the integration of micro-archives...form a new and vitally important frontier of scholarship' (2014, p. 113). Furthermore, as pointed out by O'Sullivan, 'no one academic discipline is going to tell us everything we want to know about the Irish [or other] Diaspora. The study of migration, emigration, immigration, population movements, flight, scattering, networks, transnational

¹⁹ Here, Richards is referring to Gerber (2006) who argues that 'emigrant letters, or indeed any type of personal correspondence, is almost always a commentary on the individual psyche of the writer...[letters] are restricted to the way individual writers recreated their own personalities, their emotional conditioning to the experience of emigration, reformulating their relationships and reconstructing their personal identities' (Richards, 2010, p. 13 summarising Gerber, 2006).

communities, diaspora – this study demands an interdisciplinary approach’ (2003, p. 131).²⁰

The solution to these issues, I want to argue, lies in the digital humanities (which includes corpus and computational methods of analysis such as those described in this essay). A multi- and inter-disciplinary field of study, the digital humanities brings together scholars from across the disciplines to look at ways of harnessing the power of new technologies in humanities research. Once letters are digitised and annotated in a formalised and consistent way it is possible to interconnect micro-archives, allowing the user to constantly move between the individual and the whole, comparing individual letters against letter collections to notice uniqueness and difference, as well as patterns and trends, within the data. As summarised by Guldi and Armitage, ‘micro-history and macro-history – short-term analysis and the long-term overview – should work together to produce a more intense, sensitive, and ethical synthesis of data’ (2014, p. 119). The digital humanities also offers exciting possibilities for the study of emotions history. In this essay I propose one possible method for analysing topics, themes and emotions within digitised emigrant letter collections. This involves identifying and extracting all instances of a particular topic within a letter series before using corpus methods to analyse the language to see if any linguistic patterns emerge. Through this process a local grammar of the various topics, themes and emotions begins to emerge which can be compared against other datasets, taking into consideration sociobiographic variables such as class, sex and cultural background. Through this process a fuller picture of the migrant experience – their feelings, concerns, beliefs and motivations – begins to emerge which might complement existing research which focuses more on

²⁰ See also Brettell and Hollifield (2000, p. vii).

the social conventions that guided and facilitated emotional expression in the first place.²¹

4. Methodology

I began by reading Julia’s letters – identifying sequences in the discourse that appear to be lexically related – to see what broad topics emerged. 24 distinct topic categories were identified, listed alphabetically in the ‘Topic’ column of Table 2, below.²²

Topic	Tag
Daily Life	<dailyLife></dailyLife>
Deaths	<deaths></deaths>
Education	<education></education>
Enclosures	<enclosures></enclosures>
Family / Friends	<familyFriends></familyFriends>
Future Letters	<futureLett></futureLett>
Greeting	<greet></greet>
Health / Illness	<healthIll></healthIll>
Homesickness / Separation	<homeSeparation></homeSeparation>
Identity	<identity></identity>
Ireland / America	<IrelandAmerica></IrelandAmerica/>
Migration	<migration></migration>
News Event	<newsEvent></newsEvent>
Previous Letters	<previousLett></previousLett>
Recollections	<recollections></recollections>
Religion	<religion></religion>
Remittance	<remittance></remittance>
Reunion	<reunion></reunion>
Salutation	<salutation></salutation>
Sign Off	<signOff></signOff>
Transportation	<transportation></transportation>
Weather	<weather></weather>
Work	<work></work>
Writing Process	<writingProcess></writingProcess>

Table 2: Topics in the *Julia Lough Collection* in alphabetical order

The next stage was to annotate each letter for topics. The ‘Tag’ column in Table 2 shows the tags (in angle brackets) that were used to mark where a topic begins and where it ends. Thus, for the topic ‘News Event’ (used to describe any reference to local, national or international news), the opening tag <newsEvent> was used to show

²¹ See, for example, Reddy (2001) and Matt (2011).

²² Full descriptions of all twenty-four topics is detailed in Moreton (2016).

where the topic begins and the closing tag (with forward slash) `</newsEvent>` was used to show where the topic ends, as follows:

`<newsEvent>`I suppose you must have heard of the hard times is all over the country and all the shops and factories shut down We have read about some in New York Starving it seems to be a scarsety of money and all the banks have nearly all failed or closed I hope there will be some change for the better soon`</newsEvent>` (*Julia Lough Collection*, 3 September 1893).

In cases where the discourse could be interpreted in more than one way, two or more tags were assigned. This meant that a section could be said to be ‘about’ just one topic, or it could be said to be ‘about’ a number of topics. In the example above, where the text is annotated with the tags `<newsEvent></newsEvent>`, an alternative interpretation might be the topic ‘Ireland / America’ (used to describe any reference to life in Ireland or America – although it is worth noting that the words ‘Ireland’ and/or ‘America’ rarely appear in Julia’s letters, instead she uses person and place deixis²³ such as ‘we’, ‘here’ and ‘this country’ when referring to America, and ‘you’, ‘there’ and ‘over there’ when referring to Ireland). In cases where a section of the discourse could be interpreted in more than one way the annotation would be as follows:

²³ ‘Deixis concerns the ways in which languages encode or grammaticalize features of the context of utterance...and thus also concerns ways in which the interpretation of utterances depends on the analysis of that context of utterance’ (Levinson, 1983, p. 54).

<newsEvent><IrelandAmerica>I suppose you must have heard of the hard times is all over the country and all the shops and factories shut down We have read about some in New York Starving it seems to be a scarsety of money and all the banks have nearly all failed or closed I hope there will be some change for the better soon**</IrelandAmerica></newsEvent>** (*Julia Lough Collection*, 3 September 1893).

Additionally, it is possible for a topic (or several topics) to be embedded within a main topic. In the example below, for instance, Julia enquires about her sister's children and as such this section could be said to be about 'Family / Friends'. Within this section Julia makes specific reference to the importance of schooling, so the tag for the topic 'Education' (used to describe any mention of learning) has been embedded within 'Family / Friends', as follows:

<familyFriends>Well Mary Dear I had no idea you had so many children I knew Lizzie was about the same age as Katherine Walsh let me know all about them and who they look like **<education>**above all things keep they to school regular and as long as you can. There is nothing like a good education. No matter where they roam it is every thing now**</education></familyFriends>** (*Julia Lough Collection*, n.d. 1889-1894).

Once all 35 letters had been annotated for topics it was possible to do two things: 1) count the number of times a topic occurs within Julia's letters; 2) write a simple program to automatically extract all instances of a particular topic to look more closely at the language.

To get a better sense of the topics – what they are and how often they occur – Table 4 organises the topics into three columns, with the raw frequencies shown in brackets.

The Column A topics have been separated out because of their function. These tend to be highly routine and/or genre-related formulaic and structural features that occur in all correspondence²⁴ (that is, features which help to organise the letter content – the salutation, the greeting, references to previous and future letters, the sign off, and so on). The topics ‘Future Letters’ and ‘Previous Letters’, for instance, are a significant part of Julia’s correspondence (and emigrant correspondence more generally), often taking up large sections of the discourse, and potentially providing useful insights into letter writing networks and the flow of correspondence over time. Additionally, the ‘Greeting’, ‘Salutation’ and ‘Sign Off’ (which typically include the use of vocatives and honorifics), although very conventional and formulaic in nature, can reveal something about the educational background of the letter writer as well as the relationship between author and recipient. Finally, ‘Weather and Seasons’ (occurring in 23 out of 35 letters) also appears to be a structural feature of Julia’s correspondence, helping to organise the discourse by signaling a change of topic.

Column B shows the topics that occur 10 times or less across the 35 letters. Some of these topics (‘Daily Life’, ‘Identity’ and ‘Migration’, for instance), although not very frequent, seem to be more personal and reflexive in nature, showing moments of greatest authenticity, directness, expressiveness and personal identity.

Finally, Column C lists the remaining – higher frequency – topics. As one might expect, the topics ‘Family / Friends’ and ‘Ireland / America’ score high in Julia’s

²⁴ The term ‘formulaic language’ is used here to refer to multi-word units that closely resemble phrases found in similar generic points with similar functions in personal letters generally.

letters. ‘Remittance’ (any reference to money sent from America to Ireland) is a particular feature of emigrant correspondence that is certainly worth further exploration as the strategies employed by letter writers to justify and/or explain the remittance (the amount of money being sent, what it should be used for, or why money has not been sent) potentially offers another layer of insight into the personal relationships embodied within the correspondence.

There is some overlap between some of the topics listed in Table 3.

‘Homesickness / Separation’, ‘Recollections’ and ‘Reunion’, for instance, are certainly linked, thematically. However, there were noticeable differences between these topics which justified them having categories of their own. Whilst the topic ‘Recollections’ refers to instances in which Julia remembers specific events from the past (‘This time a year ago she was near been called away. She used to dread the winter so much’ (*Julia Lough Collection*, n.d. November, 1895)), ‘Homesickness / Separation’ refers to those instances where Julia expresses feelings of nostalgia and loneliness as well as anxieties and fears about family and home (‘I was heart broken the other night I dreamed you was dead and I could not See you and you never left any message for me so I woke up crying and I was so frightened till I realized it was only a dream’ (*Julia Lough Collection*, 25 January 1891)). The topic ‘Reunion’, on the other hand, refers to those instances where Julia states her hope, desire or intention to, one day, return to Ireland to be reunited with her family. These tend to be short, freestanding statements, helping to reassure the recipient (Julia’s mother or sister) that they are missed (‘when you see me again I hope we will spent a happy time together yet perhaps sooner than you thing [*sic passim*] I know you would grow young again’ (*Julia Lough Collection*, n.d. December 1888)).

Column A <i>(Topics which help to structure the letter content)</i>	Column B <i>(Topics with a frequency of 10 or less)</i>	Column C <i>(Topics with a frequency of more than 10)</i>
Previous Letters (49)	News Event (10)	Ireland and America (66)
Future Letters (41)	Reunion (10)	Family and Friends (58)
Greeting (35)	Deaths (9)	Religion (48)
Salutation (35)	Daily Life (8)	Recollections (31)
Sign Off (33)	Writing Process (8)	Homesickness / Separation (28)
Weather and Seasons (31)	Identity (6)	Health and Illness (24)
	Education (2)	Work (23)
	Migration (1)	Enclosures (17)
	Transportation (1)	Remittance (16)

Table 3: Topics organised by function and/or frequency

Because it is possible for a section of the letter to be ‘about’ more than one topic, the next stage of the study involved looking at how often each topic was in primary position (i.e. where it was the main focus of a particular section of the letter) or secondary position (i.e. where it was an alternative interpretation of a particular section, or it was a topic embedded within another, primary, topic). It should be noted that nearly all of the topics can be in primary or secondary position. However, from reading the letters, there appeared to be patterns: some topics seemed to dominate a particular letter/s whereas others seemed to be a background theme carried across all correspondence. Table 4 details the number of times a topic was primary (column A), or secondary, tertiary etc. (columns B to I). (The figures in Table 4 represent the number of occurrences of a particular topic. Focusing on ‘Family / Friends’, for example, we can see that this topic was in primary position (column A) 48 times, it was in secondary position (column B) 3 times, tertiary position (column C) 5 times, and so on.) Topics that most frequently occur in primary position are shown in bold; those that most frequently occur in secondary (or other) position (columns B to I) are highlighted in italics; and topics that occur in primary and secondary position roughly the same number of times (within + or -2) are shown in grey. Looking at Table 3 and Table 4 together, some observations can be made. Structural features (those topics that are listed in Column A of Table 3) are typically primary, helping to organise the

flow of discourse. Topics which occur ten times or less (Column B of Table 3) also tend to be primary; these topics are rare, but when they do occur they are given prominence in the letters. Finally, the topics listed in Column C of Table 3 are secondary, tertiary, or other (i.e. they are not the main focus of the letter); these topics (often implicit references repeated across Julia's correspondence) seem to contribute to underlying themes within the discourse. For example, the topic 'Ireland / America' is almost always in secondary position (59 out of 66 occurrences). Although it is quite rare for Julia to speak directly about life in America (which might alienate the recipient), the reader gets a sense of her feelings, experiences and perceptions from the comments that are made in the context of other topics, such as 'Weather' or 'Work', as follows:

<weather><irelandAmerica>We have had such cold rainy weather till now
 There is nothing planted here yet that I can see The trees are coming to bud
 and sweet May is **here** again**</irelandAmerica></weather>** (*Julia Lough Collection*, n.d. May 1893))

<work>I am sure you work hard but Lizze will soon be able to help you work
 that seen good **<irelandAmerica>**We all work hard
here</irelandAmerica></work> (*Julia Lough Collection*, n.d. 1889-1894)

	<i>Primary</i>	<i>Secondary or other position</i>							
Topic	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
Family / Friends	48	3	5	1	1	0	0	0	0
Salutation	35	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Previous Letters	34	12	1	0	1	1	0	0	0
Greeting	33	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Sign Off	33	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Future Letters	27	6	6	1	0	0	0	1	0
Weather	21	6	3	0	0	0	1	0	0
Recollections	16	2	6	3	3	0	1	0	0
Religion	14	18	7	5	2	1	1	0	0
Homesickness / Separation	13	9	5	0	0	0	1	0	0
Remittance	12	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Health / Illness	10	5	6	1	1	0	1	0	0
News Event	9	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Enclosure	8	4	3	2	0	0	0	0	0
Reunion	8	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0
Ireland / America	7	41	9	4	3	1	0	0	1
Writing Process	6	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Work	5	6	5	3	1	2	1	0	0
Death	4	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Daily Life	4	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Transportation	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Education	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Identity	1	1	2	2	0	0	0	0	0
Migration	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0

Table 4: Primary versus non-primary topics

The study so far has involved a personal reading of Julia Lough's correspondence to identify topics and themes. The (digitised) letters were then annotated, allowing me to count the number of times each topic occurred within Julia's letters, noticing when a topic was the main focus of a particular section of the letter and when it was more of a passing comment – an aside, or background information – embedded within another, primary, topic. The next stage involved extracting all instances of a particular topic to see if any patterns in the language emerged, which might, in turn, reveal something about Julia's experiences and relationships. In this essay I shall concentrate on one topic – 'Recollections'. Indeed, memories and nostalgia are features of Irish emigrant letters observed by both Miller and Fitzpatrick, so a closer look at the language of recollections may provide new insights into how these sentiments are discursively constructed.

5. Findings

Having extracted all occurrences of ‘Recollections’, the corpus tool *Sketch Engine* was used to observe patterns in the language. Within the ‘Word List’ option in *Sketch Engine*, all Parts of Speech (POS) tags with an n-gram value of two, which occur 10 or more times in the *Julia Lough Collection* were extracted. N-grams are defined as X number of words which appear consecutively Y number of times; the analyst can set the parameters. Table 5 gives the 10 most frequent POS 2-grams for ‘Recollections’.

What follows is a summary of some of the main observations.

N-gram	Pattern	Freq.	Examples
1	<i>Personal Pronoun + Verb (Present Tense)</i>	30	I remember (7) / I hope (6) / I suppose (5) / I know (2) / you see (2) / I dont (1) / I think (1) / me know (1) / you do (1) / you hate (1) / you know (1) / you look (1) / you make (1)
2	<i>Determiner + Singular Noun</i>	23	every thing (3) / the family (2) / a look (1) / a picture (1) / a prosession (1) / a shilling (1) / a year (1) / all winter (1) / an try (1) / any way (1) / every night (1) / that yard (1) / the fall (1) / the last (1) / the rest (1) / the side (1) / the size (1) / the winter (1) / this time (2)
3	<i>Personal Pronoun + Verb (Past Tense)</i>	22	she used (3) / we used (3) / you used (3) / I used (2) / I did (2) / he used (1) / I looked (1) / I noticed (1) / I saw (1) / it recalled (1) / it used (1) / you got (1) / you reminded (1) / I felt (1)
4	<i>Preposition + Personal Pronoun</i>	21	of them (2) / of you (2) / to me (2) / to you (2) / with me (1) / about me (1) / about us (1) / as it (1) / as you (1) / for me (1) / for us (1) / if I (1) / if it (1) / if she (1) / in I (1) / like me (1) / to we (1)
5	<i>Infinitive ‘To’ + Verb (Base Form)</i>	19	to get (3) / to go (2) / to mass (2) / to buy (1) / to do (1) / to dread (1) / to give (1) / to hear (1) / to pray (1) / to promise (1) / to say (1) / to see (1) / to think (1) / to try (1) / to write (1)
6	<i>Personal Pronoun + Adverb</i>	19	I never (2) / I often (2) / she always (2) / I always (1) / me not (1) / she often (1) / them well (1) / they still (1) / us all (1) / us here (1) / you either (1) / you good (1) / you often (1) / you so (1) / you still (1) / you yet (1)
7	<i>Adjective + Singular Noun</i>	17	back view (1) / common sense (1) / convent garden (1) / different life (1) / fine time (1) / good picture (1) / good time (1) / great change (1) / hearty cry (1) / last evening (1) / last time (1) / last year (1) / little trunk (1) / other night (1) / poor picture (1) / precious baby (1) / red ribbon (1)
8	<i>Verb (Present Tense) + Personal Pronoun</i>	15	suppose you (4) / hope you (3) / do they (1) / hope she (1) / know I (1) / know you (1) / remember them (1) / remember you (1) / see you (1) / suppose he (1)
9	<i>Adverb + Adjective</i>	14	as bad (2) / very thankful (2) / almost past (1) / as good (1) / just right (1) / not able (1) / only last (1) / so good (1) / so many (1) / so much (1) / very happy (1) / very poor (1)
10	<i>Determiner + Adjective</i>	14	a great (4) / the same (3) / a good (2) / a different (1) / that precious (1) / the back (1) / the last (1) / the other (1)

Table 5: Ten most frequent 2-grams occurring ten times of more in the *Julia Lough Collection*

i) Remembering

N-gram 1 shows a relatively high frequency of the pattern *Personal Pronoun + (Present Tense) Verb* in Julia's letters, as in 'I remember', 'I hope', 'I suppose' etc. 'I/she/you remember' is the most frequent combination (see concordance lines (1) to (8), below). In six of these occurrences, Julia is the subject of the clause – the participant who is remembering. Julia remembers physical objects: for instance, 'those beads' (3); actions and events: 'how long you used to pray' (5); and experiences and feelings: 'how delighted I was' (4). The act of remembering is evident across most of the letters and serves to authenticate Julia's attachment to the homeland. Recalling specific details about people, places and events creates a bridge between the two worlds enabling author and recipient to be united through their past, shared experiences.

Turning now to n-gram 3 – *Personal Pronoun + (Past Tense) Verb*, as in 'I used to', 'I looked', 'I noticed' etc. – 13 out of the 22 occurrences contain the verb 'used (to)'. Julia is the subject of just two of those structures: 'how delighted I used to be' (4) and 'I used to long for one of them gooseberrys [*sic passim*]' (12). In the remaining 11 occurrences, Julia recalls the actions, routines and habits of others: her father (4), her family (5, 6), her sister (5, 6, 9, 13), and her mother (10, 11). In these occurrences, Julia reassures the recipient of the letter (her mother or sister) that they – and family in Ireland – are remembered, whilst at the same time demonstrating that she 'knows' and understands their likes, dislikes, traits, fears and routines. In these occurrences a sense of 'knowing' is textually performed through the language of recollection. By talking about shared experiences and by demonstrating that she remembers all details about home, Julia seeks to reinforce bonds with loved ones in Ireland.

1. Liz is very thankful to you She often talks about home and **remembers** every thing that happened there (*Julia Lough Collection*, 3 November 1889)
2. write so and dont forget that where ever I am **I remember** you yet (*Julia Lough Collection*, 1 September 1892)
3. supposing you are not able to go to mass all winter I am sure you make those beads of yours rattle in fine time every night. **I remember** them well the size of them (*Julia Lough Collection*, n.d. December 1893)
4. **I remember** how delighted I used to be when he used to give me a shilling at xmas I hope Dear Father is praying for us all in Heaven. (*Julia Lough Collection*, n.d. December 1893)
5. I have thought of Mother very much all through May **I remember** the prayers **we used to** say during May let me know do you pray as much now as when I was at home. **I remember** well how long **you used to** pray I never could be as good as you any way Dear Sister I often think of those Dear old happy days. I know **you used to** always agree with me in everything an try to think every thing I did was right (*Julia Lough Collection*, 4 June 1894)
6. **you used** always be so good to me wasent I bold but I did not have common sense then have you got that little trunk yet we used to try hard to get a look in **I remember** (*Julia Lough Collection*, n.d. 1889-1894)
7. That is certainly the back view of Asylum. in viewing it it recalled a great many things to my mind **I remember** going there to see Father (*Julia Lough Collection*, 24 May 1893-94)
8. you see how little I know after so many years, **you will remember** us (*Julia Lough Collection*, 17 March 1919-20)
9. I am sure you are not lonesome with that precious baby if she looks like me Mary will have to buy her that yard of red ribbon **she used to** promise me (*Julia Lough Collection*, 1 September 1892)
10. This time a year ago she was near been called away. **She used to** dread the winter so much (*Julia Lough Collection*, n.d. November 1895)
11. does your cough be as bad as **it used to** be or do you go to Mass every Sunday I hope you get along well (*Julia Lough Collection*, 30 March 1891)
12. do they still have a prosession in Convent garden. how **I used to** long for one of them goosebirrys (*Julia Lough Collection*, 24 May 1893-94)
13. I often think of Mary when **she used to** go to [Toyer?] I hope she has a good time now and sleeps till nine oclock mornings (*Julia Lough Collection*, n.d. 1889-90)
14. Indeed I never could forget my darling Mother (*Julia Lough Collection*, n.d. December 1888)

ii) Time and frequency

N-gram 6 shows a relatively high frequency of the pattern *Personal Pronoun* + *Adverb*, as in ‘I never’, ‘I often’, ‘she always’ etc. Some of these pronoun/adverb combinations can be found in the examples above (underlined in examples 1, 5, 6, 12 and 13). Here, the adverbs are used to emphasise the extent to which Julia thinks about home: ‘I often think of those Dear old happy days’ (5) and ‘I often think of Mary’ (13), for instance. In the case of example (14) – ‘I never could forget my darling Mother’ – Julia underscores the impossibility of her ever being able to forget. Additionally, the adverb ‘always’ seems to be used to emphasise the sense of ‘knowing’ described previously. In examples (5) and (6) Julia demonstrates that she knows and understands her sister based on past experiences, repeated over time: ‘you used to always agree with me’ and ‘you used always be so good to me’. This

demonstration of knowledge about family seems to be a strategy for reinforcing family bonds.

Another observation, looking at examples (1) to (14), is to do with the use of time deixis including seasons: ‘Winter’ (3, 10), months ‘May’ (5), and yearly events ‘Xmas’ (4), as well as references to the passing of time: ‘after so many years’ (8) and ‘this time a year ago’ (10). Seasons, months and yearly events appear to trigger specific memories. These deictic features place Julia at a particular point in time: writing in the present, she places herself firmly in the past to a period when she and her family were together.

iii) Predicting

N-gram 8 shows a relatively high frequency of the pattern *Present Tense Verb + Personal Pronoun*, as in ‘suppose you’, ‘hope you’, ‘know you’ etc. A closer look at these n-grams in context reveals that they are typically part of what Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) describe as projection structures. Projection structures consist of two main components: the projecting clause (*I suppose*) and the projected clause (*he is married*). In these structures the primary (projecting) clause (*I suppose*) sets up the secondary (projected) clause (*he is married*) as the representation of the content of either what is thought, or what is said (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004, p. 377).²⁵ Projection structures have the ability to articulate the author’s expectations, desires, or beliefs onto the recipient thus contributing to the intersubjective nature of correspondence. There are, of course, interpretative limitations when working with one-directional correspondence collections, such as the Lough letters. For one, it is simply not possible to know how the recipient of the letter responded to its content.

²⁵ For a more detailed account of the use of projection structures in the Lough letters see Moreton (2015).

However, an analysis of projection structures will reveal something about ‘the writer’s [or author’s] expectations about what the addressee [or recipient] may bring to the text and the kinds of response that the text will elicit from the addressee’ (Thompson, 2012, p. 80).

In structures containing the verb ‘suppose’, Julia is always the subject of the projecting clause (*I suppose*). These structures seem to function in two ways: 1) they contribute to the interactive nature of the letters, requiring the recipient to agree, disagree, confirm or deny the statements being put forward; and 2) they help to construct an imagined world based on Julia’s past knowledge of family and friends in Ireland. This imagined homeland relies, however, on things in Ireland having stayed the same since Julia’s departure: ‘supposing you are not able to go to mass’ (15), ‘I suppose you still do the same’ (18) and ‘I suppose you look about the same’ (19). In these occurrences Julia predicts that people, places and routines have not changed in Ireland – people ‘do’ the same, and ‘look’ the same. Unfortunately, letters from Julia’s mother and sister are not available, so the extent to which Julia’s family in Ireland confirmed or rejected these projections is unknown.

In summary, the verb ‘suppose’ is very ‘other’ oriented. In using ‘I suppose you’ the author performs awareness of the recipient’s world (i.e. the content of the projected clause is about the recipient’s world rather than the author’s) and in imagining the recipient’s world the author shows how vivid that world – home – is for them.

In contrast, the verb ‘hope’ seems to represent powerless wishing – it is a very deferential verb. It expresses a wish for another person without assuming the right or the power to make the wish come true. In some ways it resembles praying to a greater power – the author hopes or wishes for things for other people without making any

presumption that they have the right, power or authority about whether it happens, or not, as in: ‘you are much smarter than when I was home but I hope you will not have so much to do anymore’ (*Julia Lough Collection*, n.d. December 1888).

15. **supposing** you are not able to go to mass all winter (*Julia Lough Collection*, n.d. December 1893)
16. I was dreaming the other night about Dick Conroy. I suppose he is married by this time (*Julia Lough Collection*, n.d. November 1895)
17. **I suppose** you often talk about me and what a little snit I was but you know I am eight years older now and that makes a great change we will hope for the better it was only last evening Liz and I was talking she says she always considered me different in all my ways from the rest of the family. I think every thing she says is just right - she always cared for me and treated me the best in the family (*Julia Lough Collection*, 10 October 1893)
18. **I suppose** you still do the same with yours (*Julia Lough Collection*, 24 May 1893-94)
19. **I suppose** you look about the same you See what a different life yours and mine has been (*Julia Lough Collection*, 21 March 1893)

iv) Sameness and difference

N-gram 9 shows a relatively high frequency of the pattern *Adverb* + *Adjective*, as in ‘as bad’; and n-gram 10 shows a relatively high frequency of the pattern *Determiner* + *Adjective*, as in ‘the same’. In examples (20) and (21) Julia appears to be posing questions relating to her mother’s health and whether her health is the same, or different (that is, worse). Examples (22) and (23) are part of the projection structures mentioned in the previous section. In these examples the author predicts that the recipient of the letter does the same and looks the same; however, in example (23), Julia gestures to a sense of difference. Whilst Julia predicts that things are the same in Ireland, she suggests that things are very different for her in America. And in example (24) Julia reports that she has changed, she is different. Ireland represents lack of change, while America represents progress.

20. does your cough be **as bad as** it used to be or do you go to Mass every Sunday I hope you get along well (*Julia Lough Collection*, 30 March 1891)
21. and if your Cough does be **as bad as** usual and are you able to get out to mass every Sunday (*Julia Lough Collection*, 25 January 1891)
22. I suppose you still do **the same** with yours (*Julia Lough Collection*, 24 May 1893-94)
23. I suppose you look about **the same** you See what **a different** life yours and mine has been (*Julia Lough Collection*, 21 March 1893)
24. but you know I am eight years older now and that makes **a great change** (*Julia Lough Collection*, 10 October 1893)

Using *Sketch Engine* to identify n-grams is one way of examining the topic ‘Recollections’. Another way is to use the online corpus analysis and comparison tool *Wmatrix* to identify key semantic fields within the language. To do this, the extracts for ‘Recollections’ were compared against a general reference corpus. The results are summarised in Table 6 and would appear to support the *Sketch Engine* findings. The semantic fields ‘Time: Past’ and ‘Frequent’, for example, reveal that phrases expressing time and frequency are statistically significant in the ‘Recollections’ corpus, when compared to a general corpus of letters. Additionally the semantic fields ‘Knowledgeable’, ‘No knowledge’ and ‘Thought, belief’ would support earlier observations regarding the high frequency of verbs which express memories (‘remember’, ‘used to’ etc.) and predictions (‘suppose’). However, some new observations do appear to come to light from the *Wmatrix* investigation: the semantic fields ‘Happy’ and ‘Evaluation: Good’ may suggest a connection between recollections and positive emotions, as in: ‘Dear Sister I often think of those Dear old happy days’ (*Julia Lough Collection*, 4 June 1894) and ‘I remember how delighted I used to be when he gave me a shilling at xmas’ (*Julia Lough Collection*, n.d. December 1893). Recollections, it seems, evoke positive feelings.

Semantic Tag	Semantic Field	LL Score	Examples
T1.1.1	Time: Past	40.12	used to, last year, last time, ago, the other night, last evening
X2.2+	Knowledgeable	18.48	remember, now, remembers, recalled
X2.1	Thought, belief	15.67	think, suppose, considered, trust, thought, felt, thinking, viewing
N6+++	Frequent	14.79	always
X2.2-	No knowledge	13.12	forget, forgotten
N6+	Frequent	12.35	often, every Sunday, again, every night
E4.1+	Happy	9.83	happy, joys, enjoy yourself, delighted
Z8	Pronouns	9.08	I, you me, she, it, that, your, we, us, yours, them, my, he, they, what, its, her, everything
A8	Seem	7.18	looked, look
A5.1+	Evaluation: Good	6.82	good, great, well, fine

Table 6: Key semantic fields in the *Recollections Corpus* compared with the *Letters Reference Corpus*

6. Discussion and conclusion

Ultimately, the methodologies I have been outlining in this essay allow us to explore the language Julia uses to talk about different topics and emotions. In the case of ‘Recollections’, the verbs ‘remember’ and ‘used (to)’ feature heavily in Julia’s letters. Julia recalls the personal traits and physical appearances of family back in Ireland (what they used to do and what they used to look like, for instance) as well as remembering specific places, events, and experiences. This contributes to a theme of ‘knowing’ within Julia’s letters. By recounting, in very specific detail, a person, place or event, Julia is able to connect with family back home. ‘Home’, as Fitzpatrick puts it, becomes ‘a spiritual rendezvous for separated kinsfolk’ providing correspondents with ‘common moments of imaginable communion’ (1994, p. 494). Additionally, *Personal Pronoun + Adverb* combinations (‘I always’, ‘I often’) are used to emphasise how frequently Julia remembers home, while time diexis (references to months, seasons and annual celebrations, such as Christmas or St Patrick’s Day) are a trigger for certain memories and, it would seem, positive emotions.

Another significant feature of the language of recollections is the high frequency of projection structures containing the verb ‘suppose’, which are used to construct an imagined homeland based on past, shared experience. In these structures Julia predicts that things have not changed in Ireland – the landscape, the people and places are exactly as Julia left them. In contrast, however, America represents change, difference and progress. This dualistic position is, arguably, a common feature of emigrant letters more generally where ‘the greater the tensions incidental to exposure to new social systems and cultures, the greater...the desire to preserve a feeling of rootedness in a personal past’ (Elliott, 2006, p. 2).

The idea of Ireland representing sameness most probably stems from Julia's need for 'rootedness'; it is imposed onto the recipient (Julia's mother and sister) as without this common ground Julia's sense of self, in relation to her family, may be threatened.

The focus of this chapter has been narrow, examining just one collection of correspondence from the much larger archive of 5,000 emigrant letters held by Miller. But through repeating the process I have described here, using letters by authors from a range of socio-historical, economic and cultural backgrounds, a more comprehensive local grammar of my key topics may begin to emerge, providing a fuller picture of the language and functions of emigrant correspondence and a stronger case for the various resulting readings and interpretations. Future research will involve establishing local grammars for all twenty-four topics and then testing to see whether those local grammars (specific words, phrases and patterns in the language) might indicate the thematisation of a particular topic in other letters. This process may, in turn, lead to the semi-automation of topic detection in emigrant correspondence, allowing much larger data sets to be analysed for topics, themes and emotional content; there is, however, a long way to go. Equally too, of course, this further research may show that the linguistic features and themes I have identified here need to be expanded or refined as other, more typical ones emerge. Nor should we forget that the discourses and topics that do not emerge may be as telling as the ones that do. Indeed, a more detailed keyword or key semantic field comparison, with a suitable reference corpus, might pinpoint some notable absences, as negative key items, for instance.

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